

# Iowa Joint Operator Certification and Training Coordination Committee

Friday, January 26, 2007 – IAMU Office, Ankeny, Iowa

## Meeting Minutes

### 1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jon Martens at 10:00 a.m.

*Present were:*

• Dale Acheson, IAWWA	• Steve Mrstik, KCC
• Alan Borden, IAWWA	• Harris Seidel, IWPCA
• Jane Enfield, IDNR	• Laurie Sharp, IDNR
• Marty Hoffert, IAWWA	• Jill Soenen, IAMU
• Steve Hopkins, IDNR	• Jim Stricker, IWPCA
• Kirk Kemper, IAMU	• Jim Utter, IWPCA
• Marty Kunkel, IAMU	• Mike Wildung, IRWA
• Jon Martens, IAWWA	• Joe Zervas, IDNR
• Jim McElvogue, IWPCA	

Visitors: None

### 2. Adoption of Agenda

Moved by Marty Hoffert, seconded by Marty Kunkel, to adopt the agenda as distributed by e-mail a week earlier. Motion carried.

[NOTE: An agenda can be obtained from any Joint Committee member within the three days preceding a meeting of the Joint Committee.]

### 3. Approval of November 17, 2006 Minutes

The secretary pointed out one correction needed on page 3, line 5—the word "treatment" should be replaced with the word "training." This phrase will then read "If training is required, then I can send my employees to the training."

An additional change was to eliminate four words in line 14 on page 3. The sentence will then read "Response: There is a ton of training out there, and most of it is very good."

Mike Wildung moved to approve the minutes with these changes, seconded by Jim Utter. Motion carried.

### 4. Public Comment

None.

### 5. Unfinished Business/Assignments

#### a. Press Release

Rhonda Guy was not present.

#### b. NTK Subcommittee Progress Report

Status quo: no progress since the last meeting.

#### c. Operator by Affidavit Subcommittee

The subcommittee held its second meeting on January 25, and Jon Martens distributed copies of a five-page draft guidance document. Subcommittee members were as follows:

Jon Martens, Water Operations, Atlantic (Chair)  
Alan Hanson, Operator by Affidavit, Ellsworth

Brian Klein, Operator by Affidavit, Kuehl and Payer, Storm Lake  
Tom Grafft, Operator by Affidavit, Kuehl and Payer, Storm Lake  
Susan Miller, IDNR Region 1 Field Office (wastewater)  
Robert Pyle, IDNR Region 6 Field Office (water)  
Carrie Kirchhoff, City Clerk, Lewis  
Laurie Sharp, IDNR certification staff  
Jane Enfield, IDNR certification staff

Joint Committee members were requested to review the draft and bring their comments to the March 16 meeting.

**d. Grade A Training Scope Subcommittee**

No report.

**e. Facilities Classification Subcommittee**

This subcommittee also met for the second time on January 25. Subcommittee members are as follows:

Jim Stricker, IDNR Region 5 Field Office (Co-chair)  
Jim Utter, Altoona Wastewater (Co-chair)  
John Luther, West Des Moines Water  
Steve Mrstik, Kirkwood Community College  
Tom Thorpe, Water Development Company, Ankeny  
Scott Harter, ABC staff  
Mike Fields, Marshalltown Wastewater  
Paul Nolan, consultant, Sioux City, liaison to IWPCA

Each subcommittee member evaluated several treatment plants using the recently revised ABC points rating system. These were largely Grades II and III facilities, both water and wastewater. The result:

15 were downgraded  
6 were upgraded  
22 did not change  
43 TOTAL

The subcommittee found that the main reason for the downgrades was the size factor. In the ABC system, a plant receives one point for each 10,000 population served plus one point for each 1 mgd; thus, many plants considered medium-sized in Iowa would receive only two or three points for size which results in a fairly low point total. It appears that the points credited for size are more realistic on a national scale where a medium-sized plant would receive many more points for size alone, reflecting the complexity of a larger facility. Maximum total points which can be credited for size are 20. Under the ABC system, plants with 31 to 55 points are rated Grade II, and those with 56 to 75 points are rated Grade III.

Why consider adopting the ABC points rating system for facilities classification? This would require a lot of work. First, because adopting a points system, even if modified to better fit Iowa, would better align us with national ABC guidelines. Second, because the points system reflects plant complexity better than our present system of size and treatment type alone.

The subcommittee plans to meet again and work toward a proposal for a points system which would be more representative of Iowa.

**f. Water Distribution Amendment**

Discussion was deferred to the March meeting.

**g. Report on CEUs Being Earned**

Discussion was deferred to the March meeting.

**h. McElvogue-Hoffert Amendment**

The public hearing on this amendment was held on January 24 at the IDNR and went smoothly. It was not crowded. Fortunately, everyone who appeared favored the amendment which states that "Two years of direct responsible charge experience in a Grade III or higher position may be substituted for one year of directly related post-high school education for Grade IV certification up to three-fourths of the post-high school education requirement."

This is exactly the language proposed by Jim and Marty. Congrats to our resident rule-writers!

**6. New Business**

**a. ABC Conference.** Laurie Sharp reported on the national ABC Conference held January 16-19 in Savannah, Georgia. About half the registrants attended a pre-conference workshop on operator certification on Tuesday, the 16<sup>th</sup>, led by Jenny Bielanski, lead certification staff person in EPA's Washington, D.C. HQ office. Certification staff from eight of EPA's 10 regions attended which indicates the importance EPA placed on this workshop.

Topics for small-group discussions included professionalism of operators; capacity-building; pay levels; operator recruitment, retention, and succession; more training; and educating the public and owners on the important role of certified operators. The real issue is who is going to do what about these very complex and challenging problems, and where will the funding come from? EPA is not suggesting that it has either the answers or the funding. Instead, it was agreed that improvement in these areas is up to the states and, more specifically, up to the state organizations such as IAWWA, IWPCA, and others.

One thing the participants agreed upon: The worst possible alternative would be to lower standards (certification requirements) to attract or allow more people into the field. Owners might be pleased by lower pay requirements, but the net result would surely be a downgrade in performance, just the opposite of where we're trying to go.

Overall, it was very gratifying to observe the commitment by EPA and Jenny Bielanski personally to certification. On Friday morning, she outlined her own next steps as follows:

1. Hold discussions with EPA regional lead certification staff
2. Brief EPA senior management
3. Provide feedback to ABC participants
4. Provide an update at the 2008 ABC Conference

Much of this information was included in a PowerPoint presentation prepared by Jenny after the workshop and shared by Laurie with the Joint Committee during this meeting.

Here are some other highlights from the ABC Conference.

On-line Exams. Six states, including Iowa, are now using ABC exams on-line primarily or totally. The acceptance by both the certifying agencies and the operators has been extremely positive. More states will be using this service.

CEU Renewal/Record Procedure. Only a few states are doing anything near the streamlined procedure of our IDNR where the Recording Agency submits CEU information electronically to IDNR to be recorded automatically in the operator's training record. Many wish they could.

Wastewater Collection System Certification. New York is in the early stages of building a voluntary WWCS certification program. Approximately 70 operators were certified last year.

Classification is based on ABC guidelines. The voluntary program was initiated because 1) there was no hope for legislation for a mandatory program at this time, but 2) the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) was strongly committed to and supportive of the concept. The DEC has surveyed cities to collect statistics on system characteristics, overflows, etc. and has sent out letters pointing out the obligations of the owners inherent in the health and safety aspects of EPA requirements under the Clean Water Act. The program itself is administered by the New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA) through a five-member committee; one of the five is a DEC staff person. NYWEA does have some paid staff.

Relevance. What training is directly related to an operator's job and thus qualifies for CEUs? Many certification authorities have struggled with this issue. We are all familiar with chainsaw maintenance, retirement planning, and other "poster" examples of why guidance was badly needed.

ABC's approach to this was to convene a national relevancy workshop in Chicago in September 2005. Laurie Sharp was one of the 18 leaders invited to participate. The group first developed definitions: Relevant w/ww continuing education training must be on topics that are essential (underlining by this writer) to the operation and maintenance of w/ww facilities/systems and influence drinking water quality, water supply, and/or public health and the environment for the operator certificate(s) to which the training is applied.

The workshop then prepared lists of approved topics which were put through an intensive series of reviews by another ABC Task Force and by ABC Validation and Evaluation (V&E) Committees. The draft lists were presented at the January 2007 Conference and were voted on by the ABC Board. It was stressed that these lists are for GUIDANCE. Certification authorities are free to adopt all, some, or none of the product. In any case, the lists must be fluid, dynamic, open to additions and deletions to keep pace with the flow of technology and practice.

Iowa can take considerable pride in this product, much of which, even after all the reviews, follows our Iowa lists almost verbatim. In the words of a 2005 workshop participant, "We took Iowa's lists and . . . ."

One final comment. It is obvious that Laurie Sharp has established a real presence and has restored Iowa to a leadership position in ABC.

**b. Issuing Agency Agreement.** Joe Zerfas opened this discussion with some background. In December 2003, IDNR issued its *Issuing Agency Policy and Procedures Guide* which included a revised model Issuing Agency Agreement. Only three organizations have submitted IAAs—IRWA, IAWA, and ACEOPS. Three others have either formally or in effect declined to do so, citing the additional time and cost involved in submitting the biennial report which is part of the agreement and also indicating that they see no benefit for their organizations. Two have requested and KCC has agreed to be their Issuing Agency. A 45-minute discussion ensued.

The original 1996 model IAA was only one and a half pages long. The 2003 model is only one page longer but requests the IA to submit "a succinct report, tailored to their specific circumstances, activities and accomplishments." IDNR chose not to provide a template for this biennial report, leaving the format to the individual creativity of each IA.

Chapter 81 Rules include this definition: "'Issuing agency' means a professional, technical/educational organization authorized by the department to provide continuing education for certification renewal or upgrade in accordance with the commitments and guidelines detailed in the written issuing agency agreement and procedures."

IDNR's intent was to empower our Associations to provide training which met IACET guidelines and then issue CEUs for that training so that IDNR would be relieved of reviewing and judging every training

event. Accredited colleges, universities, and technical institutes are, by their special status, privileged to issue CEUs for training/education they provide without any such review or agreement. It can be argued that community colleges are, thus, not IAs as defined above. Can they serve as IAs and issue CEUs for programs they do not provide, such as our Association Annual Conferences? Possibly so if they choose to sign IAAs with IDNR and follow through on all the requirements. A Recording Agency is not a de facto Issuing Agency for training provided by other organizations.

To address some of these issues, IDNR is proposing a symposium in April with the training organizations in order to share input on what is and what is not working and to suggest improvements.

## **7. Representative Comments**

### **a. IDNR**

Steve Hopkins reported that the new IDNR web page is up and running. Of particular interest to operators is that it has their individual records of CEUs earned at least as current as reported to IDNR. Jim McElvogue complimented IDNR on this great service and offered the following suggestions.

1. Display a reminder on the database web page that users may need to temporarily allow "Pop-ups" so they can view the instructions on how to export or print the database information.
2. Separate out the data on the City, State, Zip Code line to allow the zip code to be listed in a separate field. This will allow users to sort the database by the zip code, allowing them to receive a bulk mail discount form the U.S. Postal Service.

Steve also noted that Iowa was now very close to 100 percent transition to electronic exams. Operators continue to be very pleased by receiving their certificates within a few days after passing an exam.

### **b. IAMU**

Jill Soenen announced that Advanced Water Treatment and Water Distribution Workshops will be offered at the IAMU campus on March 7 and 8, respectively.

### **c. IAWWA**

Marty Hoffert reported that Jerry Stevens, General Manager of the West Des Moines Water Works, won election as a national Vice President of AWWA at the January 2007 Board meeting. Congratulations!

Regional meeting dates are as follows:

Region 1 – March 7	Region 4 – March 28
Region 2 – October	Region 5 – March 14
Region 3 -	Region 6 – March 21

The Joint Spring Short Course is scheduled for April 24 and 25 in West Des Moines, and the Joint Fall Short Course will be held September 11 and 12. This year's Annual Conference will be in Davenport.

### **d. IRWA**

Mike Wildung reported that IRWA's Annual Conference will be held February 19-21 at the Downtown Marriott in Des Moines.

Later Note: Brad Robbins announced his departure from IRWA effective January 31 to accept employment with Municipal Supply. Brad expressed his appreciation for his time on the Joint Committee and offered his help on certification in the future.

### **e. ISU**

No one present.

**f. IWPCA**

Jim Utter announced that the IWPCA retreat for officers and committee chairs is being held in Ames this weekend, January 26 and 27. The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Maintenance Conference will be held at DMACC on January 30 and 31. The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Collection System Specialty Conference is scheduled for March 1 and 2 at the Best Western Regency in Marshalltown. The 16th Annual Biosolids Conference will be held on March 14 at DMACC, and the Region 5 meeting will be held March 28 in Ames.

**g. KCC**

Steve Mrstik reported a historic change of direction. In the summer of 1975, a ground-breaking ceremony was held on the KCC campus to mark the start of construction of Iowa's Environmental Training Center, the first in the nation to receive 109(b) funding from EPA. This year, the water and wastewater plants are being dismantled and removed from the ETC. They will be replaced with a bio-diesel facility for bio-technical training.

**8. Assignments**

Rhonda Guy – Press release and descriptive article

Staff – NTK progress report

Staff – Hoffert/McElvogue amendment progress report

Jim Stricker/Jim Utter – Facilities classification subcommittee progress report

Staff – Report on CEUs being earned

All – Be prepared for discussion of the Operator-by-Affidavit Guidance Document

All – Be prepared to discuss water distribution certification

**9. Next Meeting**

Friday, March 16, 2007, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. at the IAMU office in Ankeny.

**10. Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn was made by Jim McElvogue; seconded by Steve Mrstik; motion carried. The Joint Committee adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Harris F. Seidel, Secretary